HOW MEDIEVAL EUROPE WAS RULED

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NOBILITY, LOYALTY AND DYNASTY IN MEDIEVAL BOSNIA

Emir O. Filipović

Introduction: Time and Space

Researching and explaining how medieval Bosnia was ruled is an extremely challenging assignment, primarily due to the paucity of available contemporary sources but also because there are quite a few contradictions and peculiarities in the formation of the country's internal structure. This means that numerous problems are yet to be resolved while many key questions still remain unanswered. However, as elsewhere in the broader region at the time, ruling Bosnia came to depend on the strength and quality of the bonds that existed between the central authorities, embodied in the person of the ruler, and the landowning nobility who, as representatives of their communities and true holders of local power, rivalled him for wealth, prestige and political influence. Therefore, I aim to present here the complex relationship between the monarchs of the royal house of medieval Bosnia and the various noble families that were nominally subjected to them, with a particular emphasis on the tense power dynamic that these two crucial elements of governance had in this rather specific political organism.

But before beginning to describe and analyze the intricacies of how Bosnia was ruled and administered during the Middle Ages, it would be important to provide several brief notes on the time when it emerged as a state and the space it occupied throughout the medieval period, in the hope that this will help to situate its history into a broader chronological and geographical context. A cursory outline of the earliest documented sources on Bosnia from the tenth century onwards, along with an explanation of how its marginal position in regards to the established centres of Latin and Orthodox Christendom impacted its political and religious constitution, should make it easier to follow the discussion about the methods that Bosnian rulers implemented in an attempt to deal with the nobility who had their own ideas on how the state should be governed.

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